



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

For Release February 16, 1990 Elizabeth Lipscomb 202-343-5634

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE DIRECTOR ANNOUNCES ADDED PROTECTION
BEING CONSIDERED FOR THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT**

John Turner, director of the U.S. Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service, will propose a reclassification of most African elephant populations from "threatened" to the more critical "endangered" status under the United States' Endangered Species Act. This is a move aimed at providing additional protection for the African elephant.

The reclassification would cover elephant populations in all but three African countries--Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

"Most of Africa is on the brink of losing its largest living land mammal," Turner said. "And while recent conservation actions may have helped curtail the population decline, the latest status review indicates the elephant is still in danger of becoming extinct throughout much of Africa." Turner emphasized that today's announcement is not a final decision. It is a finding which will be followed by a formal proposal and a 120-day period for public comment. A final decision will be made only after all public comments are thoroughly reviewed.

Turner added that the proposal would not impact import procedures currently in effect for sport-hunted elephant trophies taken from any elephant populations remaining under the threatened category.

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During the past year, the Interior Department has pressed aggressively for measures to protect the species, which has suffered a 50-percent decline in population over the last decade. Last June, the United States banned all elephant ivory imports and in October, Assistant Secretary Constance Harriman led a U.S. delegation that was successful in urging an international trade ban at a meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). At that time, the species was reclassified from CITES Appendix II to the more critical Appendix I, invoking strict controls and banning international commercial trade among approximately 100 participating nations.

The decision to propose reclassification on the United States' list was based on a comprehensive year-long status review of African elephant populations conducted by the Service. The assessment concludes that the African elephant still faces threats that could lead to its extinction in significant portions of its range.

The review was in response to a petition requesting reclassification filed in February 1989 by the Humane Society of the United States, the Animal Welfare Institute, and other conservation organizations. The petition presented substantial information indicating that reclassification may be warranted. Those data, and additional new information received by the Service through public comment procedures, indicate that reclassification is warranted.

The review indicates that, in recent years, elephant populations in Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe appear to have remained stable or increased. Enforcement capabilities in these countries are believed sufficient to provide adequate protection, and their elephant management programs seem acceptable. Therefore, the proposal to reclassify the African elephant will exclude populations in these three countries, where the elephant will remain under the "threatened" category.

Because the elephant is already listed on Appendix I of CITES, most international commercial trade in elephants or parts has ceased. An endangered status would halt interstate commerce and impose stricter permit requirements for possession or for importing the species for scientific or enhancement purposes.